



# THE MASTER OF THE WORLD

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JULES VERNE



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## THE MASTER OF THE WORLD

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*A TALE OF MYSTERY AND MARVEL*

BY

JULES VERNE

AFTER THE  
"THE MASTER OF THE WORLD," ETC.

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# THE MASTER OF THE WORLD

## I

### WHAT HAPPENED IN THE COUNTRY

The mountain range parallel to the American Atlantic sea-board, which ploughs through North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania and New York State, bears the double name of Allegheny Mountains and Apalachian Mountains. It is formed of two distinct chains.

Although this mountain system, which is the largest in this part of North America, runs for a length of about nine hundred miles, its average height is not above six thousand feet, and its culminating point is marked by Mount Washington, which rises to a height of six thousand two hundred feet.

This spinal column, if one may so describe it, one end of which slips into the waters of the Alabama and the other into those of the Saint Lawrence, offers no great inducement to the Alpinist to visit it. It cannot have the attraction of the superb summits of the old and the



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new worlds, inasmuch as its upper edge is not set in profile in the high zones of the atmosphere. Nevertheless, there was one point in this chain, known as the Great Ivy, which tourists had not succeeded in attaining and which had every appearance of being inaccessible.

Moreover, although this Great Lary had been reckoned hitherto by the mountaineers, the time was at hand when it was to excite the attention, and even the desire of the public for some very particular reason, which I need not go on at the end of this story.

[illegible]

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course of which I was to find myself at grips with impenetrable mysteries. The only thing is that at the very beginning of this story it is absolutely necessary that my word should be believed. In support of these most marvellous facts I can adduce no other evidence than my own. If you don't want to believe me, very well; you won't believe me.

The Great Eyry is situated precisely upon a point in this picturesque chain, the Blue Ridge, which is outlined on the western side of North Carolina. Its rounded form can be seen distinctly as one leaves the little market town of Morganton, built on the banks of the Catawba river, and better still from the village of Mount Pleasant, which is a few miles nearer.

What is this Great Eyry, actually? Is there any justification for the name given to it by the inhabitants of the districts in the neighbourhood of this Blue Ridge region? That these mountains should be so named because of their outline, which assumes a blue tint in certain atmospheric conditions, is perfectly natural and obvious. But does the reputation of the Great Eyry as an aerie mean that birds of prey--eagles, vultures, or condors, actually have their refuge there? Is it a habitat particularly chosen by the large



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internal energy? Was there any reason for fearing, in its proximity, all the violence of Krakatau and the fury of Mount Pelée? . . . In the hypothesis of a lagoon, was there not room for fear that its waters, penetrating into the bowels of the earth and turned to vapour by the central heat, might threaten the plains of Carolina with an eruption equal to that of Mount Vesuvius in 1923? . . .

Now, to be precise, in support of this last eventuality certain symptoms recently observed had disclosed, by the production of steam, some volcanic process in operation. Once, the peasants working in the fields had heard hollow sounds that were inexplicable.

Shadows of flame had been seen at night.

Flame emerged from the interior of the Great Lake, and when the wind had beaten them down towards the east they left trails of ash, or, it was said, upon the ground. And lastly, in reflection, those wan flames, reflected by the low-lying clouds, had spread a sinister halo over the country.

It was precisely at this strange phenomena, that it happened that the countryside gave vent up to its anxiety. And to this anxiety, which everyone need to know what the facts were. The Carolina newspapers were not ever dealing upon what they

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called "The Great Ery Mystery." They asked whether it was not dangerous to remain in such a neighbourhood. Their articles excited both curiosity and nervousness—curiosity on the part of those who, running no risk, were interested in natural phenomena, and nervousness on the part of those who were in danger of being among the victims if these phenomena were a menace to the surrounding country. For the most part, these were the inhabitants of the small market towns of Pleasant Garden and Meranton, and of the villages or mere farms which were fairly numerous at the foot of the chain.

Certainly it was a pity that mountain-climbers had not tried better to penetrate into the Great Ery. The narrow neck of rock with which it was surrounded had never been broken through, and offered perhaps a breach through which access to the interior might have been gained.

But was not the Great Ery dominated by a more towering and far away, more cone of peaks, where the eye might gaze the while exposed? No, and within a range of rounded hills its altitude was never reached. Mount Webster, a part of the same chain, the whole Appalachians, in fact, lay behind its crest at too great a distance.

Nevertheless, a thorough survey of this Great Eyry was now imperative. In the interests of the whole region it was necessary to know whether or not it contained a crater, and whether a volcanic eruption threatened this western district of Carolina. So it was decided that an attempt should be made to reach it and to ascertain the cause of the phenomena that had been observed.

Now before this attempt, the serious difficulties attending which were quite understood, one opportunity presented itself, which would undoubtedly permit a survey of the interior disposition of the Great Eyry to be made without the necessity of making an ascent of it.

In the first few days of September in this year an air balloon, manned by the aeronaut Wilkes, was to start from Morganton. Taking advantage of a breeze from the east, the balloon would be carried towards the Great Eyry, and there was some chance that it would pass right above it. Then, when he commanded it by some hundreds of feet, Wilkes would examine it through a powerful glass and would take observations of its depths; he would ascertain if the mouth of a volcano opened within its lofty rocks. That was the main question. That once decided

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it would be known if the surrounding country had reason to fear an eruption in a future more or less remote.

The ascent was made according to the programme. The wind was medium and steady, the sky was clear. The morning mists had just dispersed beneath the warm rays of the sun. Provided the interior of the Great Lys were not filled with ice, the aeronaut's eye would be able to sweep its whole extent. If any steamy exhalations were escaping from it he would surely detect them. In that case it would have to be acknowledged that a volcano, having the Great Lys as its crater, existed at this point of the Blue Ridge.

The ball, in rising at once to an altitude of fifteen hundred feet and remaining motionless for a quarter of an hour. The breeze was unexceptional at that height, although it blew freely at the earth's surface. But when the "aérostat" reached the ball and descended for a few moments, it took on a westerly direction, blowing from the south-east towards the north-west. It was possible that it would blow in that direction. The wind altered again, the ball making a circle, and then it began to descend later that it had come to earth, and then it rose to a height of

The attempt having failed, it was decided

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that another should be made when conditions were better. As a matter of fact, more noises were heard, accompanied by smoky vapours and by wavering lights, which were reflected by the clouds. So it will be understood that the general uneasiness could not be allayed and that the country rested under the threatened terror of volcanic phenomena.

In the first few days of April of that year the apprehensions, which had been more or less vague hitherto, had serious reasons for developing into panic. The newspapers of the region promptly echoed the public terror. The whole district lying between the mountain range and Morganton had cause to fear an imminent upheaval.

During the night of the fourth to the fifth of April, the inhabitants of Pleasant Garden were awakened by a commotion followed by an alarming report. An irrepressible panic followed, the idea being that that portion of the mountain chain had just fallen in. Everybody rushed from their houses, ready to take to flight, all fearing that they would see some immense abyss opening, in which farms and villages, covering an area of ten to fifteen miles, would be swallowed up.

The night was very dark. A ceiling of thick clouds lay heavy over the plain. Even at



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mid-day the slope of the Blue Ridge would not have been visible.

In this darkness it was impossible to distinguish anything, impossible to make reply to the cries which rose on every hand. Terrified groups, men, women, children, tried to recognise the practicable roads and pushed forward in wild tumult. Here, there, and everywhere frightened voices were heard.

"It's an earthquake!"

"It's an eruption!"

"Where is it coming from?"

"The Great East!"

And as far as Blount and the news was spread that evening, and later, and still later, were running on the country. It might have been pointed out, at the least, that in the case of an eruption, the fire and noise would have come on more gradually. Flashes would have appeared on the crest of the mountain chain. "The earthquakes" dreams of lava could not have escaped being seen in the night, the darkness. But no one thought of this, and the terrified people concluded that their houses had felt the shaking of the earth. It is quite possible that this shaking was caused by the fall of a mass of rock, detached from the side of the gorge.

Earthquake was a poor term for this anxiety, ready to take its flight towards Pleasant

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larden or Morganton. An hour went by without fresh incident. A breeze from the west, partially checked behind the long screen of the Appalachians, just made itself felt through the coarse foliage of the conifers massed together in the shallow marsh lands.

So there was no new panic, and everyone prepared to return into his house. It seemed that there was no further cause for fear, and yet everyone found the day very long in coming. That there had been a landslip in the first place, that an enormous mass of rock had been thrown down from the extreme heights of the Great Ery, seemed to be beyond all doubt. It would be easy to ascertain that definitely at the first glimmer of dawn, by going along the base of the range for a few miles.

But about three o'clock in the morning there was another alarm; flames rose up above the edge of rocks. Reflected by the clouds, they illuminated the atmosphere over a wide expanse. At the same time a crackling sound was heard.

Was it a fire that had broken out spontaneously in the place, and to what cause was it due? Fire from Heaven could not have set it alight . . . No crash of thunder broke the air . . . True, the fire would not

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have lacked fuel to feed on. At this altitude the Allegheny range is still wooded, on the Cumberland Mountains and on the Blue Ridge, too. Many trees grow there, cypresses and palm trees, and other evergreens. . . .

"An eruption! An eruption!"

The cry echoed on every hand. An eruption! So the Great East was only the crater of a volcano, scooped out in the bowl of the earth! I must for so many years, so many centuries even, had it just burst into activity again? Would a fall of burning lava, a torrent of volcanic material, be added to the plague? . . . Would its lava come rolling down upon them, annihilating or covering them, scattering in its way, the first towns, villages, and cities, the whole of the vast country side, indeed, its plains, its hills, its rivers, as far as Pleasant Canyon and Niagara near the end?

The more the people looked on, and listening could hear it. The women, dragging their children and clad with terror, pointed on to the volcano toward the east, the eruption not so much from the west as the volcanic destruction of the earth. Many more, shouting their fears, raised their voices as though in a single breath, and at the same time, in the crowd, there were a little, and sharp, which seemed

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in terror in every direction. Imagine the confusion of this weltering mass of men and animals, in the middle of a dark night, in the heart of forests exposed to the fires of a volcano, along the edge of marches, whose waters were in danger of overflowing their banks! And did not the very ground threaten to sink from under the feet of the fugitives? Would they have time to save themselves if a sudden eddy of burning lava, uncoiling along the surface of the ground, cut off their road and made flight impossible?

Some few, however, of the principal farmers, more reflective men, held aloof from this panic-stricken mob, whom all their efforts could not restrain.

Reconnoitring about a mile from the range they observed that the brilliance of the flames was diminishing and that, perhaps, they might end in going out altogether. In sober truth it did not appear that the region was threatened with an eruption. Not a single stone had been hurled into space, not a single torrent of lava was streaming down the slopes of the mountain, no rumbling ran through the bowels of the earth. There was no sign of those seismic disturbances which can upheave an entire country in one instant of time.

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This observation, then, was made, and accurately made, that the intensity of the fire in the interior of the Great Lary must diminish. The reflection on the clouds was gradually fading away, and soon the countryside would be plunged into deep darkness until the morning.

The mob of fugitives had stopped at a point where it was beyond the reach of danger. Then they drew near again, and a few villages, a few farms were occupied once more before the first glimmer of the dawn.

About four o'clock, the rim of the Great Lary showed a streak of faint reflection. The fire was burning out, from want of fuel, it might be, and although it was still impossible to determine its cause, it was not unreasonable to hope that it would not flare up again.

In any case, it appeared probable that the Great Lary had not been the scene of a volcanic eruption. And so it seemed that the industrial revolution which was not at the mercy of either an eruption or an earthquake.

But about five o'clock in the morning, when the sun had risen, still merged in the darkness of night, a strange sound was heard through the air, a sound of regular breathing.

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as it were, attended by a beating of powerful wings. And, had it but been daylight, perhaps the farmers and the villagers might have seen a gigantic bird of prey pass by, some monster of the air, which, after soaring up from the Great Ery, winged its flight in the direction of the east.

## II

### AT MORGANTON

On April 27th I arrived at Raleigh, the capital of the State of North Carolina, having left Washington the previous night.

Two days before, the director-general of police had summoned me to his office. My chief was awaiting me with some impatience. The following is a report of the conversation I had with him, which was the cause of my departure.

"John Stock," he began, "are you still the shrewd and devoted officer, who on many occasions has given us proofs of his devotion and shrewdness?"

"Mr. Ward," I replied with a bow, "it is not for me to declare whether I have lost any of my shrewdness or not. But with respect to my devotion I may assert that it remains entirely yours."

"I am quite sure of that," Mr. Ward returned, "and I only ask you this one more particular question: are you still the inquiring man, eager to penetrate the heart of a mystery whom I have known hitherto?"

"Still, Mr. Ward."

"And this inquisitive instinct has not become impaired by the constant use you have made of it?"

"Not in the least."

"Very well, Strock; now listen to me. You are not without some knowledge of what has occurred in the vicinity of the market town of Morganton?"

"Indeed, Mr. Ward, in my opinion, those phenomena, which at the very least are singular, are highly calculated to excite curiosity, even if one were not as curious as I am."

"That it is singular, even strange, Strock, there cannot be two opinions. But there is reason to inquire whether the phenomena in question constitute a danger for the inhabitants of the district, whether they are the signs of some volcanic eruption or of some earthquake."

"That is to be feared, sir."

"So it would be interesting to know what it all means. It would be well for the people concerned to be warned in time if danger threatens them."

"That is the plain duty of the authorities, sir," I replied. "We must find out what is going on up there."

"Quite so, Strock. But it seems there are grave difficulties in the way. It is said freely in the country that it is impossible to scale



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the Great Lary and visit the interior. Now, has anyone ever tried to do it, and under conditions favorable to success? I don't believe it, and in my opinion an attempt that was made seriously could not fail to have good results."

"Nothing is impossible, Mr. Ward, and no doubt this is only a question of expense."

"Justifiable expense, Strick, and expense must be incurred when it is a matter of relieving an entire population, or getting it warning of an old disaster. Besides, is it so absolutely certain that the enclosure within the Great Lary is as impenetrable as people make out? And who knows if a band of desperate criminals have not made their lair in that spot, to which they get access by paths known only to themselves?"

"What, sir? You have a suspicion that criminals . . ."

"It may be that I am wrong, Strick, and that everything that occurred there was due to natural causes. Well, that is what we want to find out, and the sooner the better."

"May I ask one question, Mr. Ward?"

"Go on, Strick."

"When the Great Lary has been visited, when we know the origin of the phenomena, if there is a crater there, if an eruption is imminent, shall we be able to stop it?"

"No, Streck. But the inhabitants of the district will have been warned. It will be known what one can depend on in the villages, and the farms won't be taken by surprise. Who knows if some volcano in the Alleghenies is not exposing North Carolina to the same disaster as Martinique under the fires of Mont Pelée? At any rate, it is necessary that this large population should have the chance of safety."

"I prefer to think, Mr. Ward, that the district is not threatened by any such danger."

"I hope so, Streck, and, indeed, it seems unlikely that any volcano exists in this part of the Blue Ridge. The range has no volcanic nature. And yet, if we are to believe the reports that have reached us, flames have been seen escaping from the Great Ery. Tremblings of the earth, if not actual quaking, have been supposed to have been perceptible as far as the neighbourhood of Pleasant Garden. Is all this real or imaginary? It is well to be sure."

"Nothing could be more prudent, sir, and no time must be lost."

"And so, Streck, we have determined to make an investigation of the Great Ery. We mean to go into the neighbourhood as soon as possible in order to collect all the information on the spot, to interrogate the inhabitants of

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the towns and farms. We have selected an agent in whom we have absolute confidence, and that agent, Strick, is yourself."

"With pleasure, sir," I exclaimed, "and rest assured I will leave nothing undone to give you every satisfaction."

"I am sure of it, Strick, and I may add that the mission is one which ought to be agreeable to you."

"None more so, sir."

"It will give you a capital opportunity to employ, and, I hope, to satisfy that especial passion which is the very basis of your temperament."

"Quite so, sir."

He then, you will be free to act as circumstances may dictate. With regard to expense, as there should be need to organise an expedition which may be costly, you will have carte blanche."

"I will act to the best, sir, and you may rely upon it."

"Now, Strick, allow me to request you to act with the greatest possible discretion when you are collecting information in the territories mentioned. The people are still greatly superstitious. You will have to disburse a great deal of money, and in any case beware of creating another panic."

"That is understood."

"You will carry credentials to the Mayor of Morganton, who will work in concert with you. Once more, be prudent, Strock, and do not enlist anyone to help you in your inquiry unless you absolutely need them. You have often given us proofs of your intelligence and your skill, and this time we have every confidence you will succeed."

"If I do not succeed, Mr. Ward, it will be because I have run up against absolute impossibilities. For, after all, it is conceivable that I may not be able to effect an entry into the Great Eyry, and in that case——"

"In that case we will see what can be done. I say again, we know that by profession and by instinct you are the most inquisitive of men, and here is a splendid opportunity to satisfy your curiosity."

Mr. Ward spoke the truth. I then asked him: "When am I to start?"

"To-morrow."

"To-morrow I shall have left Washington, and the day after to-morrow I shall be at Morganton."

"You will report to me by letter or telegram."

"I will not fail, sir. In taking my leave of you, I thank you again for having selected me to conduct this inquiry into the Great Eyry affair."

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How was I to guess what the future had in store for me? I went back at once to my home, where I made my preparations for my departure, and the next day, at dawn, an express train was bearing me towards the capital of North Carolina.

Again at the same station at Raleigh, I spent the night there, and in the afternoon of the following day the railway which supplies the western portion of the State set me down at Winston.

Winston, properly speaking, is merely an intermediate station town. Like several of the towns which particularly catch the eye, it is the centre of a large population, which are connected with it by a railway. There are abundant springs of mineral water, which in the season attract a host of consumers to the district. All round Morganton the agricultural field is considerable, and the husbandmen will soon be putting out of the fields of grain some of the many machines, which are everywhere to be seen in the corn and wheat.

The rivers in the district are numerous. The one nearest to Winston is the Catawba, on that river, in this district, a great deal of fish and fowl which is sold in great quantities in the capital.

The industrial centres several times

all seriously threatened by danger if the Great Eyry were the crater of a volcano, if an eruption covered the country with scoria and ashes, if the shocks of an earthquake reached as far as the threshold of Pleasant Garden and Morganton.

The Mayor of Morganton, Mr. Elias Smith, was a man of great stature, energetic, intrepid, enterprising, forty years old at most, with a healthy constitution that set all the doctors in America at defiance, proof against the cold of winter as against the heat of summer, both of which are sometimes excessive in North Carolina. He was a mighty hunter, not only of the furred and feathered game, which swarms upon the plains near the Apalachees, but a mighty slayer of bears and panthers, which are as common in the dense cypress groves as in the depths of the wild gorges of the double chain of the Alleghenies.

Elias Smith, a wealthy landowner, was the possessor of several farms in the neighbourhood of Morganton. He farmed some of them himself. He paid frequent visits to his tenants, and all the time that he did not spend in his country home he spent on hunting trips, to which his sporting instinct drew him irresistibly.

In the afternoon I got someone to take me to Elias Smith's house. He was at home that

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day, having been advised by telegram of my coming. I gave him Mr. Ward's letter of introduction, which was my credentials to him, and we soon struck up an acquaintance.

"It is Mr. Ward who has sent you," he said actually, "well, first let us drink to Mr. Ward's very good health!"

And we shook glasses and drained them and then the Inspector-General of Police

"Ah! now, what is it all about?" Elias Smith inquired.

I then explained to the Mayor of Montreal the reason and the object of my mission to the district of North Canada. I described the nature of the case, or rather the plot, as you called it, and the manner in which the counter-plot was to be carried out, and he agreed to see what he could do for the satisfaction of this cause. It would be realized, or at any rate put on the ground. I believe that the most serious obstacle to the success of the cause was the fact that the police were not yet organized at all the rate they should have been, and that it was necessary to have a large force of men to carry out the plan.

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Elias Smith listened to me without saying a word. As he puffed at his pipe, the attention he was paying to me was unmistakable. Every now and then I saw his face flush and his eyes gleam under their bushy brows. The chief magistrate of Morganton was manifestly uneasy about what was going on at the Great Ery, and would he as eager as myself to discover the explanation of these phenomena.

When I had finished my communication he remained silent for a few minutes, looking steadfastly at me.

"So," he said, "they want to know, over there in Washington, what the Great Ery has got inside it?"

"Yes, Mr. Smith."

"And you do, too?"

"I do, indeed."

"So do I, Mr. Strock!"

And if the Mayor of Morganton had been as inquisitive as I was, we should have made a pretty pair.

"You understand," he added, as he shook the ashes out of his pipe, "in my capacity of landowner I am interested in the stories about the Great Ery, and in my capacity of Mayor I am obliged to devote attention to the condition of the people under my administration."



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"A twofold reason, Mr. Smith," I replied, "which must have impelled you to ascertain the cause of phenomena which might cause the upheaval of the entire district. And I am no doubt you have found them as inexplicable as they are alarming to the people of the neighbourhood." "

"Inexplicable indeed, Mr. Strach, for, for your part, I am not inclined to believe that a Great Lake is a crater, because the Algonquians never believed so at all. There are certainly no holes in the land, or any other form of crater anywhere, either in the Canadian or even in the Blue Ridge valleys. So that, at least, the Niagara district has no right to be called a crater."

"But, really, what is your opinion, Mr. Smith?"

"It is, I repeat."

"And, as to the craters which have been mentioned in the past, is the crater?"

"Well, Mr. Strach, the crater?" Mr. Strach asked, leaning forward. "In the first place, it is certain that there were any craters in America at least, at the time of the last great earthquake. I was at one of the great meetings at a table in the Grand Hotel, and I saw a crater. It was at that moment, and I saw it. It was called on the map as being the crater of the earth."

"But according to the reports sent to Mr. Ward——"

"Reports drawn up under the influence of panic!" the Mayor declared. "Anyhow, I made no mention of any in mine."

"That is a point. With regard to the flames which overtopped the highest rocks——"

"Oh, the flames, Mr. Strock; that is another matter. I saw them; I saw them with my own eyes, and the clouds threw a reflection of them an immense distance. Moreover, there were audible noises at the crest of the Great Eyry: hissing, like the hissing of a boiler that is being emptied."

"You were an actual witness of that?"

"Yes; my ears were deafened by it."

"Then, in the middle of all this uproar, Mr. Smith, did you not think you detected the flapping of great wings?"

"Yes, I did, Mr. Strock. But what huge bird is there that would have flown through the air, after the fire died out, to make that flapping? What sort of wings had it got? So I am obliged to ask myself whether it was not a trick of my imagination. The Great Eyry a haunt of some monsters of the air! Would they not have been observed long ago hovering over their enormous rocky nest? In real

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himself, there is a constant about it all which has not been described.

"I am not a man of words," he said, "I am a man of deeds."

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The ascent of the mountain was to be undertaken under the direction of two guides, who had had much experience in excursions of this nature. On several occasions they had scaled the highest peaks of the Blue Ridge. However, they had never attacked the Great Eyry, knowing that access to it was barred by a wall of insurmountable rocks; and, besides, before the manifestation of the recent phenomena this Great Eyry had never excited the curiosity of tourists. Nevertheless, we could have every confidence in these two guides, whom Mr. Smith knew personally as intrepid, skilful, and faithful men. They would shrink from no obstacle, and we were resolved to follow them.

Besides, as Mr. Smith remarked, it might now be no longer impossible to penetrate into the interior of the Great Eyry.

"Why not?" I inquired.

"Because a mass of rock was detached from the mountain some weeks ago, and it may have left a gap through which we could get."

"That would be a happy chance, Mr. Smith."

"We shall find out, Mr. Strock, and no later than to-morrow."

"Till to-morrow, then!"



carriage. Nisko would put up the game when we were in the woods or on the plains; but he was to stay with the driver at Wildon all the time we were making our ascent. He could not have followed us to the Great Eyry, because of the crevasses there were to be crossed and the rocks to be climbed.

The sky was clear and the air fresh, even now, at the end of April, which is sometimes severe in the American climate.

Clouds scudded swiftly before a variable breeze, which came off the broad wastes of the Atlantic, and between them sun rays stole, illuminating all the country.

The first day brought us as far as Pleasant Garden, where we passed the night with the mayor of the little town, a personal friend of Mr. Smith. I had opportunity to make a careful observation of this region, where cypress groves yield to marshes, and marshes give place to fields. The road, which is kept in pretty good repair, crosses or follows their line, without being lengthened by many twists and turns. In places of a marshy nature the cypresses are magnificent, with their erect and slender trunks, slightly swollen at the base. The breeze rustling through the pale green foliage set a-swinging the long grey fibres, the "Spaniards' beards," which



"Nothing fresh has happened since the flames were last seen above the Great Ery?" I inquired.

"Nothing, Mr. Strock. From Pleasant Garden it is easy to survey the upper ridge of the mountain as far as the Black Dome, which commands it. We have not heard a single suspicious sound, nor seen any light. And if it was a legion of devils roosting up there, it looks very much as if they had finished their infernal cooking and made off to some other fair in the Alleghenies!"

"Devils!" Mr. Smith exclaimed. "Well, I hope they haven't decamped without leaving some tracks, tips of their tails or their horns! We'll have a good look!"

The next day, the 29th, the carriage was ready for us at daybreak. Mr. Smith took his seat, I took mine. The horses set off briskly, urged by the driver's whip. At the end of this second day's journey since leaving Morganton, we halted at Wildon Farm, among the foothills of the Blue Ridge.

There was no change in the general aspect of the country. It was an unvarying alternation of woods and marshes, these latter, however, occurring at greater intervals owing to the steadily progressive elevation of the earth at the foot of the range. The country was



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which are densely populated. There were only a few villages, also at that period the capital was not the French town, and some distant towns, apparently visited by the same caravans that seemed to be the carriers, traders, of the valuable goods. The houses and all the things that were in the night I saw, and they were as in the picture I gave a good picture of the town.

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*[Faint handwritten notes at the bottom of the page]*

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any canine type. The explanation of the name is that they make a noise like the yelping of curs. And, in point of fact, while we were trotting rapidly by, we had to stop our ears!

Densely populated cities of quadrupeds like this are not uncommon in the United States. Amongst others, naturalists mention the appropriately named Dogville, which has a population of more than a million four-footed inhabitants.

These marmots, which live on roots, grass, and also grasshoppers, of which they are very fond, are inoffensive creatures, but their howling is enough to deafen one.

In the afternoon the Blue Ridge chain appeared, only six miles off, on a wide horizon. Its edge was outlined clearly against a background of blue sky, across which light clouds were sailing. Thickly wooded at its base, where the branches of conifers were densely interlaced, a few trees stood out also against a fantastic setting of gloomy rocks. Here and there rose quaint-shaped peaks, which, on the right hand, were over-topped by Black Dome's gigantic head, gleaming at moments in the sun's bright rays.

"Have you made an ascent of the Dome, Mr. Smith?" I inquired.

"No," he replied, "but I am told it is

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pretty difficult. Besides, some tourists have reached this point, and found all is not as it seems nothing can be seen at the entrance of the Great Canyon at this point."

"That is true," the guide, Harry Horn, declared. "I have proved that myself."

"Perhaps the weather was not favorable," Harry pointed out.

"On the contrary," the guide, Harry Horn, said, "the weather is the best I have ever seen here. It is a beautiful day."

"I have heard that the weather is the best here," the guide, Harry Horn, said, "but I have never seen it myself. It is a beautiful day."

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The farmer at Wildon assured us that nothing unusual had happened at the Great Eyry for some time. We all took supper together with the farm people, and our sleep was undisturbed throughout the night.

Our ascent of the mountain was to begin at daybreak the following day. The Great Eyry is not more than eighteen hundred feet in height, no great altitude, and the average in this range of the Alleghenies. We were free to assume, therefore, that the strain would not be excessive. A few hours ought to be enough to bring us to the top ridges of the great mass. It was true there might perhaps be difficulties on the way, precipices to clear, or obstacles to surmount with danger and great effort. That was the yet unknown, the hazard of our venture. As I have said, the guides could give us no information on this head. What troubled me was that in the neighbourhood the interior of the Great Eyry had the name of being inaccessible. But, to conclude, the fact had never been proved, and there was always the chance that the fall of mountain might have made a breach in the thickness of the rocky wall.

"Well," said Mr. Smith, after he had lighted the first pipe of the score or so he smoked every day, "we are off, and right foot fore-

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is a volcano, and is a volcano always so completely extinct that you can't find a bit of hot coal about it? 'Pon my word, it would be a poor kind of volcano that hadn't fire enough to boil an egg hard, or roast a potato! But, as I said before, we shall see, we shall see!"

For my own part I am free to confess that I had formed no opinion on the subject. My orders were to go and find out what this Great Eyry was. If there was no danger to be feared from it, well and good; everybody would know it and everybody's mind would be easy. But in my heart of hearts, and the feeling was a very natural one in a man possessed by curiosity, I would have been delighted, for my own personal satisfaction and for the glory with which it would cover my mission, if the Great Eyry proved to be a hot-bed of miracles which I should be the first to explain.

Our ascent was to be made in the following order: the two guides in front, to pick the practicable paths, and Elias Smith and I walking side by side, or one after the other, as the width of the track allowed.

Harry Horn and James Bruck ventured, to begin with, through a narrow gorge which wound its way along some pretty steep declivities where many shrubs with conical seed-vessels and sombre leaves, broad ferns and



"My word!" exclaimed Mr. Smith, as he recovered his breath, "I understand why tourists are so rare on the Great Eyry—so rare that there never have been any to my knowledge!"

"The fact is," I replied, "that there would be a lot of grind and not much in the way of results! And if we hadn't special reasons for bringing our attempt to a satisfactory conclusion——"

"You never said a truer word," Harry Horn declared; "my mate and I have climbed to the top of the Black Dome several times, and we've never met so many difficulties."

"Difficulties which might easily become obstacles," James Bruck added.

The question now was how to choose on which side we should seek for a path. On the right hand and on the left rose branching masses of trees and shrubs. The right answer finally was to venture where the slopes were less steep. It might be that, after getting through the outskirts, our party would be able to go more surefootedly through the wooded part. Anyhow, one would not be going blindfolded. However, it was well not to forget that the eastern side of the Blue Ridge, with an inclination of fifty degrees, is scarcely practicable all along the range.





about ten o'clock, after repeated attempts to discover some practicable paths, one of the guides gave the signal to halt. We were at the upper edge of the wooded belt, and the trees, being less close together, permitted the eye to see as far as the first strata of the Great Eyry.

"Well, well!" said Mr. Smith, leaning back against a big palm tree, "a brief respite, a snatch of sleep, and even a snatch of food wouldn't come amiss."

"For an hour," I replied.

"Yes; and after our lungs and our legs it is time for our stomachs to do a little work."

We all cordially agreed. It was important to recover our strength. What gave rise to some anxiety was the aspect then presented by the flank of the mountain up to the foot of the Great Eyry. Above us stretched one of those naked portions which are called "blades" in the country. No footpath was visible among its sheer rocks.

This fact did not fail to absorb the attention of our guides, and Harry Horn remarked to his comrade:

"That's not going to be easy."

"Impossible, perhaps," was James Bruck's answer.

The idea caused me real vexation. If I went down again without even having been

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able to reach the Great Ery, it would mean the complete failure of my mission, not to mention the certainty I should have failed to satisfy. And when I presented myself again before Mr. Ward I should cut a sorry figure!

The canvas bags were opened, and we fortified ourselves with bread and cold meat. We took a moderate pull at the sleds. Then, the wind died! It had not lasted half an hour. We must get up, ready to start again.

James took the lead, and we only had to follow him, trying not to lag behind. Our advance was slow. Our sleds did not attempt to follow at their propellers, and Harry Hume went on to find a convenient place where we could take a detour.

It was now about twenty minutes. When he came back he pointed north-west, and we resumed our march. It was on this side that the Black Throne reared up, three or four miles away. As I have said, it would have been impossible to ascend that, because from the summit, even with a good glass, nothing could be seen of the summit of the Great Ery. Our sledges were laden with food and were slow, especially at the dipper. They were drawn with a single and a double rope, and required a lot of pulling. We had climbed a bare slope of hundred feet, when our leading guide came

to a stop before a deep crack, which cut across the ground at that spot. Roots lately snapped, branches lately broken down, blocks of rock reduced to dust, were strewn all over the place, as if an avalanche had swept over this flank of the mountain.

"That's where the huge rock that broke off the Great Eyry will have come down," James Bruck remarked.

"No doubt," Mr. Smith replied; "and our best plan, I think, will be to follow the path that it broke for itself as it fell."

And this was the path we did take—very wisely. The ruts cut by the falling block gave us foothold. Thus our ascent was made under easier conditions, almost in a straight line, and so well that about half-past eleven we were on the upper edge of the blade.

Before us, only a hundred paces off, but towering a hundred feet in height, rose the walls which formed the boundary of the Great Eyry.

On this side the framework was hewn in a most fantastic way: sharp points and needles, and, among other things, one rock whose strange design in profile took the shape of a huge eagle on the point of flight towards the upper regions of the air. It really looked as if, on this eastern side at least, the place were inaccessible.

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"Let us rest for a few minutes," Mr. Smith suggested, "and then we will see if it is possible to circumvent this Great Ery."

"Anyhow," Harry Horn remarked, "it must have been on this side that the block of rock broke away, and there is no sign of any gap on this side of the place."

That was the fact, and it was beyond question that the fall of rock had happened on this side. After ten minutes' rest the two guides got up again, and by a fairly easy slope we gained the edge of the plateau. We now only had to walk along the base of the rocks which were some fifty feet above us, overhanging us, precipitous as the rim of a bucket. The risk was that, even with an arrangement of ladders, it would have been impossible to get up to the top ridge of the enclosure.

Yes, definitely, the Great Ery's aspect was absolutely fantastic in my eyes. It might have been peopled by dragons and chimeras, and other mythical monsters, keeping guard upon it, and I should not have been surprised.

However, we proceeded to make the circuit of the oval ring wall, where Nature seemed to have done the work of man, so regular was it. Nowhere was there any breach in its curtain, nowhere any fissure in the rocks

through which one might have tried to insinuate oneself. Everywhere the crest upreared, a hundred feet in height, impossible to scale.

After following the edge of the plateau for an hour and a half we found ourselves where we had started, where we had made our last halt. I could not conceal my vexation at this discomfiture, and I could see that Mr. Smith was no less vexed than I was.

"Hang it all!" he exclaimed; "so we shall never know what is inside this confounded Great Eyry, or if it is a crater!"

"Volcano or not," I remarked, "it is not making any suspicious noise, and no smoke or flame is rising from it, nothing to foretell an imminent eruption."

Needless to say, its neighbourhood was deserted: by which I mean that there was no sign of life, except for two or three pairs of huge birds of prey hovering in the air above it. Our watches pointed to three o'clock, and Mr. Smith said irritably:

"If we stay here till evening we shan't be any wiser. We must go, Mr. Strock, if we want to get back to Pleasant Garden before night."

And, as I did not answer and did not leave my seat, he added, coming to me: "Well

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Mr. Struck, you don't answer. Didn't you hear me?"

Illegally, I was mortified at having to abandon the project and go down again without accomplishing my task. But what were we to do? Was it in my power to break open that solid fortress, to scale those tower-murked?

We had to give in, and, with a last look towards the Great Pyry, I followed my companions.

Our return journey was effected without much difficulty, and without much fatigue. Before two o'clock we left the last slopes of the mountain, and soon the farmer at Wildon was receiving us in the hall, where refreshments and a substantial meal awaited us.

"So you could not get into the inside?" he inquired.

"No," Mr. Smith replied, "and I shall only think that the Great Pyry has no existence outside the imagination of our good country people."

At half-past eight our carriage was standing outside the door of the Master of Pleasant Valley, where we were to pass the night.

And while I was vainly trying to go to sleep, I asked myself whether it would not be well to stay for a few days in the little

town, and organise another expedition. But would it have had the least chance of success?

No, the wisest plan was to return to Washington and consult Mr. Ward. So the following evening, at Morganton, I paid my two guides, said good-bye to Mr. Smith and betook myself to the station, whence the express for Raleigh was starting.



## IV

### A MYSTERY IN THE MEMPHIS CLUB

Whether the Great Lary mystery would be a fact or no, as a result of happenings and events to be known, was still a secret of the future. There was no doubt whatever that it was a matter of the very first moment of importance, inasmuch as the safety of the citizens and of the citizens of North Carolina depended upon it.

A few days later, however, when I was in the Memphis Club, public attention was attracted as suddenly by an event of a very interesting nature. This matter, too, was as puzzling even, but as mysterious as the problem of which the Great Lary had been the cause.

At the end of the month of May the Memphis newspapers informed their readers of a matter in question, which was a matter of great importance in the city.

The Memphis Club was a place of extraordinary interest, and had been travelling about the roads and the capital of Tennessee, it moved about the city of Memphis at all times could

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be formed of its shape or nature, or even of its dimensions. Everybody agreed that it was an automobile. But with regard to its motive power, people were reduced to suggesting hypotheses of varying plausibility, and when popular imagination once sets to work upon a thing it is impossible to keep it within reasonable bounds.

At this date the most highly perfected automobiles, whatever their make, whether propelled by steam or petrol, by alcohol or electricity, barely exceeded a speed of ninety miles an hour, that is, about a mile and a half a minute—a speed hardly attained by the fastest expresses on the best railway systems of America or Europe.

Now the machine with which we are concerned certainly travelled at twice this speed.

It is unnecessary to say that such a pace constituted an excessive peril on the roads, for traffic and for foot passengers alike. This fast revolving mass, coming like a flash of lightning, heralded by an alarming roaring noise, caused a violent displacement of the air, which snapped the branches of the trees by the roadside, sent the animals that were grazing in the fields mad with terror, and scattered the birds, which could not withstand the whirlwinds of dust it created as it came.

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And a remarkable detail, to which the newspapers drew particular attention, was that the macadam surface of the roads was scarcely scratched by the wheels of the huge contrivance, which left behind it no trace of the ruts cut by the wheels of heavy vehicles. There was only the lightest imprint, the merest skimming of the surface. It was its speed only which caused the dust to rise.

Naturally, complaints were raised throughout the various districts of Pennsylvania. These mad rushes of a mechanical invention, which threatened to upset everything and smash everything in its path, carriages and pedestrian alike, were intolerable. But what steps were to be taken to put a stop to it? Nobody knew to whom it belonged, whence it came or whither it went. It was not seen until it shot by like a cannon ball in its giddy career. One might as well attempt to catch a cannon ball in its flight the moment it left the cannon's mouth.

As I have said, no information was forthcoming as to the nature of the motive power of the machine. The only thing that was certain, that had been definitely ascertained, was that it left no smoke, no fumes, behind it, no odour of petrol or other mineral oil. The inference was that it was an invention

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driven by electricity that had to be dealt with, and one whose accumulators, of an unknown model, contained some fluid that was, so to speak, inexhaustible.

Public imagination, wrought up to the highest pitch, next tried to discover something else and wholly different in this mysterious automobile.

Moreover, it was not only Pennsylvania that served as a racing track for this sporting freak. Police reports soon announced its exhibition in other States: in Kentucky, in the outskirts of Frankfort; in Ohio, in the outskirts of Columbus; in Tennessee, in the outskirts of Nashville; in Missouri, round about Jefferson; and in Illinois, on the roads leading to Chicago.

In view of the alarm, it was now "up to" the municipal authorities to take all possible measures to meet this public danger. To catch a piece of machinery hurled along at such a speed was not feasible. The surest way would be to set up solid barriers on the roads with which it would collide sooner or later, and smash itself into a thousand pieces.

"Good!" said the sceptics, "this maniac will dodge the obstacles all right."

"And jump over them, if need be!" said someone else.

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Such was the situation which very properly absorbed the attention of the chief police at Washington, who were determined to put an end to it.

Now we come to what happened in the last week of May, which lent colour to the supposition that the United States were freed from the "monster" that had defied capture hitherto. Also, after the New World, there was ground for believing that the Old one would not now be exposed to a visitation from this automobilist, who was as dangerous as he was outrageous.

In the last week of this month of May, the following fact was reported in the newspapers of the United States, and the nature of the comments it evoked from the general public will readily be imagined.

The Automobile Club had just arranged a meeting in Wisconsin, on one of the roads of that State, whose capital is Madison. This road provides an excellent track for a length of two hundred miles, going from Prairie du Chien, a town on the western frontier, through Madison, and ending a little above Milwaukee, on the banks of Lake Michigan. Only one road in the world compares to it, namely, the road between Nikko and Nanode in Japan, which is bordered with gigantic cypresses

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and runs in a straight line for more than fifty miles.

A large number of cars of the very best makes were entered for this match, and it had been decided that every kind of motor should be allowed to compete. Even motor cycles could contest the prizes with automobiles.

According to calculations based on the maximum of speed that could be obtained, eighty to ninety miles an hour, the time taken up by this international race would be something under three hours for the course of two hundred miles. So, to prevent danger, the authorities at Wisconsin had stopped the traffic between Prairie-du-Chien and Milwaukee throughout the morning of May 30th.

Thus there were no accidents to be anticipated, except such as might occur to the competing cars during the actual race. That was their own affair, as everybody freely acknowledged. But ordinary carriages and foot passengers had nothing to fear, owing to the precautions that had wisely been taken.

There was an extraordinary concourse of people, and not only from Wisconsin. Several thousands of eager spectators had hastened from the neighbouring States of Illinois.

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miles before that little town, there was suddenly heard an appalling rolling roar, which came from a dense cloud of dust, accompanied by whistling screams like those of a ship's siren.

The people only just had time to fall back and escape a ruin which would have involved victims in scores. The cloud swept by like a water-spout, and it was as much as was possible to distinguish what it was that was possessed of such a speed.

Without exaggeration, it was making two hundred and forty miles an hour.

It disappeared in an instant, leaving behind it a long trail of white dust, just as the engine of an express train leaves a long trail of steam.

Evidently it was an automobile, equipped with some extraordinary engine. If it kept up the same speed for an hour it would catch up the leading automobiles, would pass them at a speed double theirs, and would reach the winning-post first.

And then on all sides rose raucous shouts, although the spectators massed along the roadside had nothing new to fear.

"It was that machine that was talked of at the fair!"

"Yes, the one that went through Illinois, Ohio and Michigan, and that the police could not stop."

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"And which no one had heard any more of, luckily for the public safety."

"They thought it was done for, smashed up, gone for good!"

When the first shock of stupefaction had passed, the most clear-headed ran to the telephone, to warn the various stations, in anticipation of the peril which threatened the racing automobiles strung out along the road when the unknown individual who drove this terrible, thundering car should come upon them like an avalanche. They would all be overwhelmed, pulverised and obliterated, and who could tell whether the man himself would not emerge safe and sound even from such an appalling collision as that?

After all, this very prince of chauffeurs must be so skilful, must control his machine with such sureness of eye and hand, that he would undoubtedly avoid any obstacle. But no matter: in spite of the steps taken by the authorities at Wisconsin to reserve the road exclusively for the competitors in the international match, the road was not reserved now.

The scouts, who had been forewarned by telephone, and had been ordered to stop the race for the Automobile Club's great prize, reported that according to their estimate,



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this astonishing car was making not less than two hundred and thirty miles an hour. Its speed was so great, as it passed them, that they could hardly make out the shape of the car, a sort of spindle affair, whose length could not be much more than thirty feet. Its wheels revolved with such velocity that the spokes were indistinguishable. Finally, it left no steam or smoke or smell behind.

As for the driver, shut up within the interior of his car, it was quite impossible to get a glimpse of him, and so he remained as unknown as when his appearance on the roads of the United States was first advertised.

The telephones had forewarned Milwaukee of the pending arrival of this outsider. The excitement caused by the news can be imagined. And the very first question that arose was how to stop this "projectile," how to build a barricade across its path, against which it might smash itself into a thousand pieces. But would there be time? Might not the car appear any minute? Why do so, indeed, for would it not be obliged to put a stop to its career willy-nilly, since the road terminated at Lake Michigan, and it could not go any further unless it changed itself into some navigable craft?

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Such were the thoughts that passed through the minds of the spectators assembled in front of Milwaukee, after they had taken the precaution to remove to a distance where they would not be bowled over by this water-spout.

It was not any minute now, but any second that their eager eyes expected to see the automobile of whose coming they had been warned.

It was not yet eleven o'clock when a distant rumbling was heard upon the road from which the dust rose in eddying circles. Piercing whistles rent the air, warning all to make way for the monstrous thing. It did not slacken speed. Yet Lake Michigan was a bare half-mile away, and its own momentum was enough to hurl it into it. Could it be that the engineer had lost control of his engine?

There was soon no room for doubt upon the point. Like a flash of lightning the car arrived off Milwaukee. When it had passed the town, did it engulf itself in the waters of Lake Michigan?

In any case, when it had disappeared beyond a bend in the road, not a trace of its passage was to be seen.

## V

### ON THE COAST OF NEW ENGLAND

At the time when these events were reported by the American newspapers I had been back in Washington for a month.

Immediately upon my arrival I had been caught to wait up to my chief. I was not able to see him. For domestic reasons he was to be away for some weeks. But it was not long before I ascertained that Mr. Ward was unaware of the failure of my mission. The various newspapers of North Carolina had reported with great minuteness all the details of my ascent of the Great Ery in the company of the Mayor of Moreau-ton.

The great vexation my futile attempt caused me will be readily understood, to say nothing of my unstudied curiosity. And indeed, I could not reconcile myself to the idea that it would not be repeated some day. What, then, could its secrets from the Great Ery? When I would make the attempt ten times, twenty times, even at the risk of my life!

Meanwhile the work involved in gaining access to the interior of the acie was not less arduous than the work of human means. There

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was nothing impossible in building a scaffolding up to the top of its high walls, or boring a tunnel through the thick wall of the enclosure. Our engineers undertake tasks more difficult every day. But in the case of the Great Eyry account had to be taken of the expense, which, in hard cash, would have been out of all proportion to the advantages to be derived from it. It might have to be reckoned in thousands of dollars, and, after all, what good would have been effected by this costly undertaking? If a volcano did yawn open at this point of the Blue Ridge, no one could have put it out, and if it menaced the district with an eruption no one could have prevented it. So all this labour would have been done at pure loss, and only public curiosity would have been satisfied.

In any case, however particular the interest might be that I felt in the affair, and however ardently I might desire to feel the Great Eyry under my feet, it was not at my own personal expense that I should have contemplated undertaking the task, and I was reduced to remarking privately to myself:

"That is a job which one of our American millionaires ought to tackle! That is a work which the Goulds, the Astors, the Vanderbilts, the Rockfellers, the Mackays, or the